



Nottoway River 2008

The Nottoway River is located in south-central and southeastern Virginia. The river's length is approximately 130 miles. It begins in Prince Edward and Lunenburg counties and flows southeasterly, forming a boundary for Nottoway-Lunenburg, Brunswick-Dinwiddie, and Greenville-Sussex counties, then meanders across Sussex and Southampton counties to its confluence with the Blackwater River at the North Carolina line, forming the Chowan River.

The Nottoway River has historically been home to a very diverse fishery for anglers in southeast Virginia. Largemouth and smallmouth bass both can be caught in good numbers along with redear sunfish (shellcrackers), redbreast sunfish (red throats) and Roanoke bass (rockbass). During the spring good numbers of American and hickory shad can be caught by anglers along with the occasional striped bass.

Biologists' data show that largemouth bass in the Nottoway reach eight inches between their first and second years of life. A twelve inch largemouth is approximately 3 years old. The oldest fish collected by biologists was eleven years old. Largemouth bass spawning success is dependent upon moderate summer flows. In years with very low flows or drought conditions (i.e. 2000, 2002, 2006 & 2007), largemouth bass spawning success is limited (see Figure 1). The same could be said during years with summer flooding. The current bass population is supported by fish spawned in 2003-2005. These fish are young and therefore small but their numbers are high relative to other years. These three year-classes should provide good fishing for the next several years. Nottoway River largemouth bass reach 12 inches by age 4. They reach 18 inches between age 7 and 8; however, those fish are not common (Fig 2).

Anglers on the Nottoway River may have also noticed a new species of catfish in the lower section of the river showing up at the end of their lines. Blue catfish have been caught for several years now from about the Bronco Club downstream. These non-native catfish have invaded the Chowan River in North Carolina and have slowly moved their way upstream into Virginia. Currently, fish up to 25 pounds have been reported and larger fish could appear as the population ages.

Shad and herring runs have recently been lower than historical averages. Currently, no herring can be possessed in the Nottoway River and only 10 shad in aggregate can be kept (that means any combination of American and hickory shad but no more than ten total). Both species of shad (American and hickory) return to the rivers at about age 3. Biologists have found out that American shad up to age 7 spawn in our rivers (Figure 3). Much like the bass population, shad numbers are dependent upon summer river flows. Data shows that shad had average or very good spawns from 2000 – 2003, but poor spawns in 1999 and 2004 (Figure 4). Biologist can predict that few fish survived the low water conditions of the 2006 and 2007 droughts. The current population is being supported by those fish spawned in 2000-03. Shad fishing could be tough in the coming years because of the recent droughts.

Overall, bass fishing is looking to improve over the next couple of years with some good year classes of young fish just now getting big enough to bite a hook. However, shad fishing may decline until summertime water levels return to normal for a couple of years. If river flows are average or above, look for the numbers of fish to increase. However, if we experience drought conditions again, expect fishing to be tough.

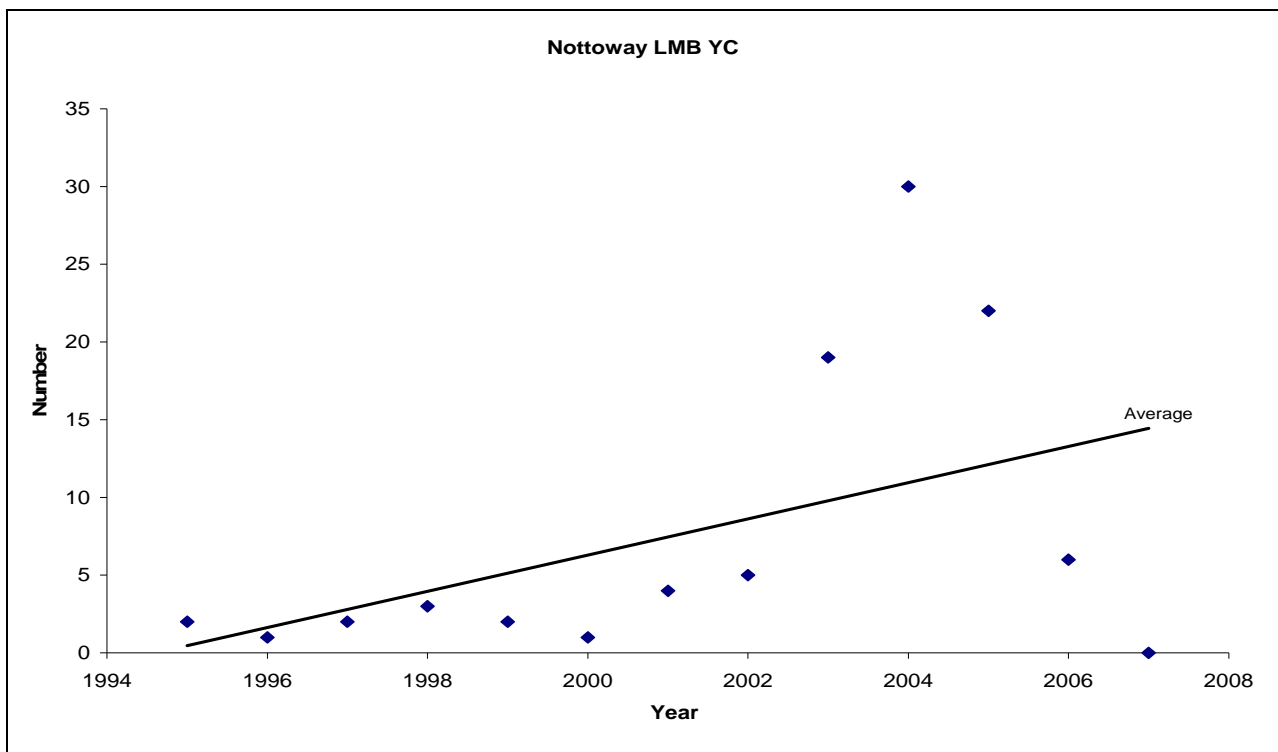


Figure 1. Largemouth bass year class success. Points above the line are above average spawns. Points below the line are below average spawns.

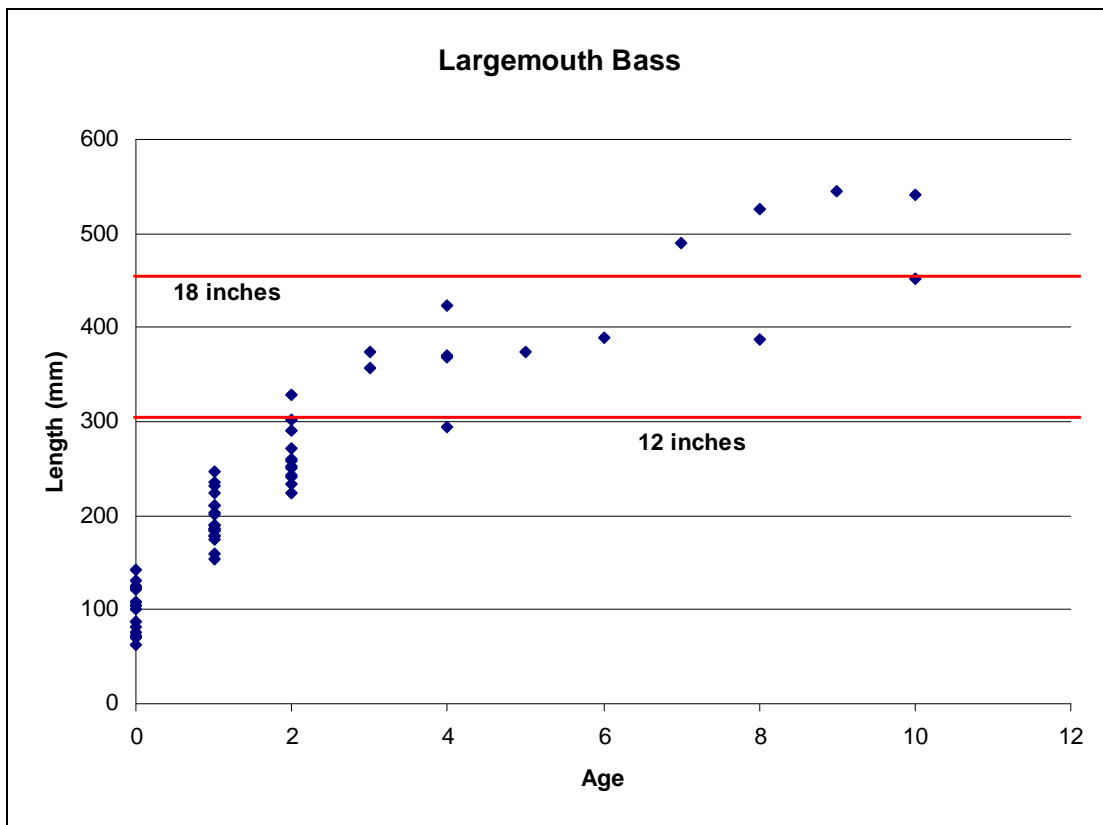


Figure 2. Largemouth bass length at age.

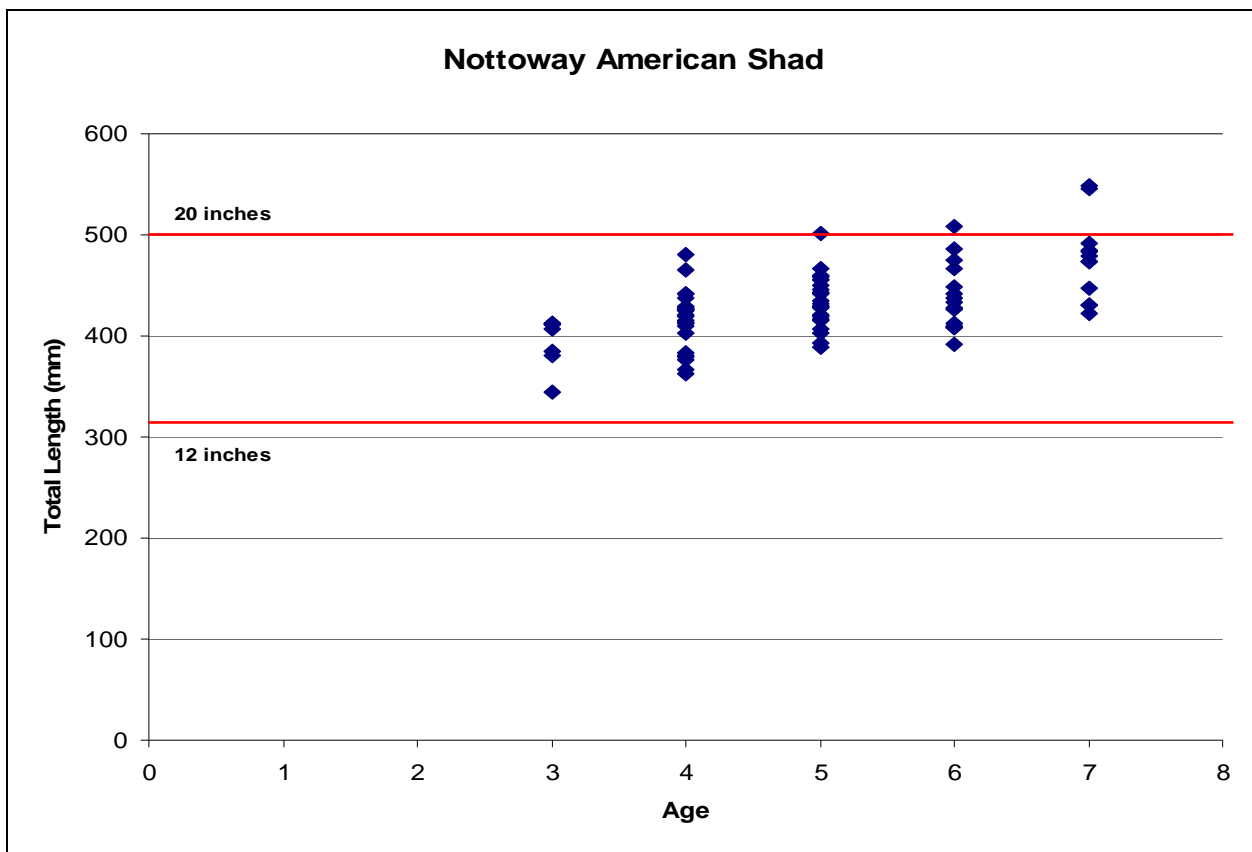


Figure 3. American shad length at age. Red lines indicate lengths of interest.

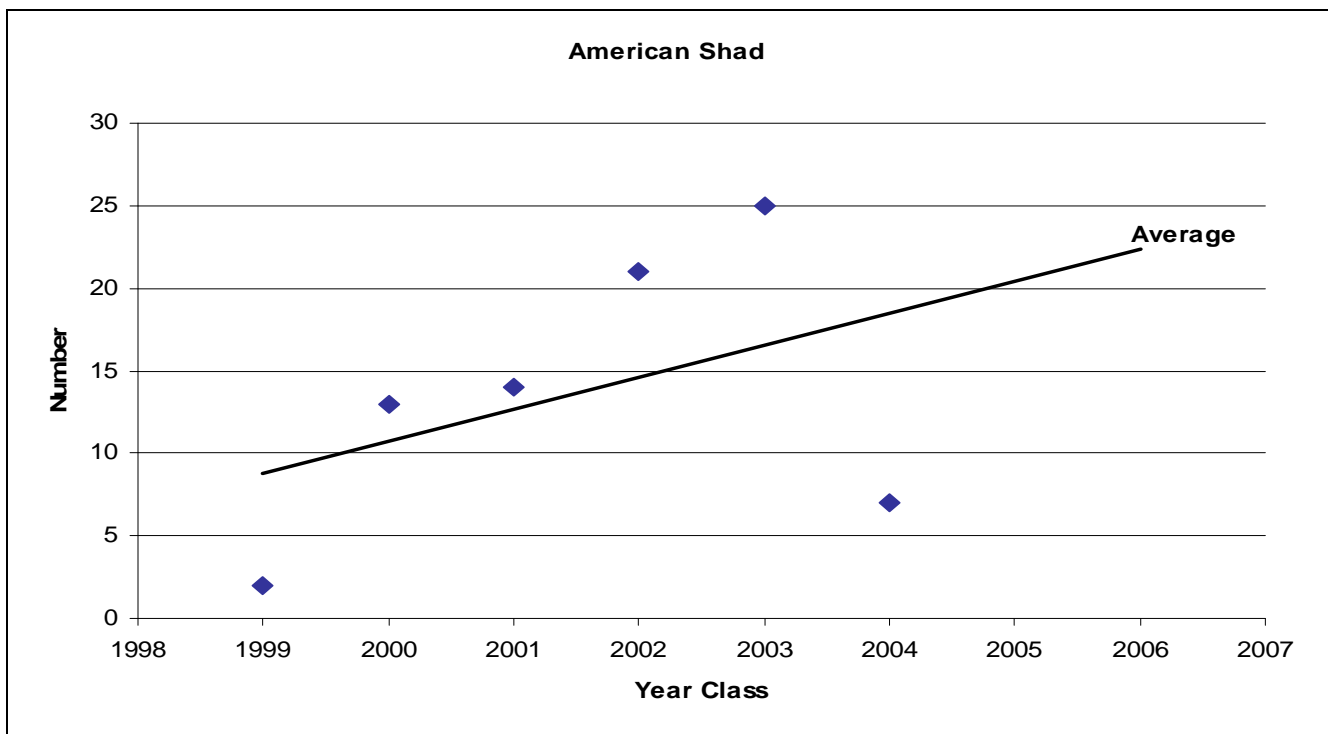


Figure 4. American shad spawning success. Points above the line are above average; points below the line are poor year classes.